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## Organization Theory: An Elephantine Problem

Human Organization Research: Field Relations and Techniques by Richard N. Adams; Jack J. Preiss; Understanding Organizational Behavior by Chris Argyris; Modern Organization Theory: A Symposium of the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior by Mason Haire; General Systems: Yearbook of the Society for General Systems Research, Vol. IV by Ludwig von Bertalanffy; Anatol Rapoport; Comparative Studies in Administration by Adm ...

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# Reviews of Books and Documents

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## Organization Theory: An Elephantine Problem

By DWIGHT WALDO, University of California

**HUMAN ORGANIZATION RESEARCH: *Field Relations and Techniques***, edited by Richard N. Adams and Jack J. Preiss. Published for the Society for Applied Anthropology by the Dorsey Press, 1960. Pp. 456. \$8.35.

**UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR**, by Chris Argyris. The Dorsey Press, 1960. Pp. 179. \$6.00.

**MODERN ORGANIZATION THEORY: *A Symposium of the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior***, edited by Mason Haire. John Wiley & Sons, 1959. Pp. 324. \$6.50.

**GENERAL SYSTEMS: *Yearbook of the Society for General Systems Research***, Vol. IV (Part II, Contributions to Organization Theory, pp. 87-185), edited by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy and Anatol Rapoport. Society for General Systems Research, 1960. Pp. 251. \$7.50.

**COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN ADMINISTRATION**, edited by the staff of the Administrative Science Center, University of Pittsburgh. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959. Pp. 224. \$6.00 cloth, \$3.95 paper.

**SOME THEORIES OF ORGANIZATION**, edited by Albert H. Rubenstein and Chadwick J. Haberstroh. The Dorsey Press, 1960. \$10.60.

### I

TRYING to review these six books is like trying to review a vegetable market. All but one are collections of essays and excerpts, and altogether there is a round hundred of pieces. The purposes and perspectives of the editors vary and the pieces vary in their subjects from steel production in the Ruhr to human fertility interviewing in the Caribbean, from administering Thematic Apperception Tests to Asian peasants to the technical problems of constructing an "artificial organism," from potential relationships of graph theory with or-

ganization theory to techniques proper for research on the social structure of a West African urban community.

It may be well, therefore, to begin with an acknowledgment that perhaps these books should not be reviewed together on the presumption that they are related by virtue of a common subject. Let due weight be given to accidents of scheduling which brought them off the press fairly close together, to the perhaps not very significant fact that the titles seem to "cluster," to a wild and aberrant impulse of the reviewer which led him to request that three books be added to three already accepted for review.

So much admitted, let us get on with an attempt to describe and characterize. What do these books have—or reject—in common? In general, what is the range of their diversity?

All of the six books are concerned with theory of organization and with methods of research on organizations. However, there is a great range in the meaning ascribed to "organization" and what "theory" about it is or might be; and the proportions between "theory" and "research" vary widely. Two books illustrate both points. At one end of the scale is probably *Modern Organization Theory*, which is in large part concerned with various theoretical models for conceptualizing and analyzing organizations. At the other end is undoubtedly *Human Organization Research* which, as the title indicates, is more concerned with methods of research than with general organizational concepts. As to the meaning ascribed to organization, the first has, in general, a harder, sharper view: a meaning given to students of administration by customary associations—a manufacturing company or government bureau, certainly; a labor union or church, perhaps. The latter has a softer, more inclusive view: a meaning given by the broad disciplinary interests of sociolo-

gists and anthropologists. So conceived, organization shades on one side into "group," on the other into "institution" or "society."

In general—as the above suggests—the authors and editors are behavioral in orientation. That is to say that they take the name and mission of social science very seriously, that they regard the biological, and especially the physical, sciences as supplying a model for emulation, and that they are deeply engaged with questions of scientific philosophy, logic, and techniques.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, not many are interested in specific practical reforms, fewer with general problems of public policy, none with philosophical concerns in a general or abstract sense. To be sure, there is a wide range of outlook and the opening phrase, "in general," bears repeating. It should be made clear also that certain authors are deeply concerned with the ethical as well as the methodological questions raised by social science research. In fact—though not necessarily by intent—*Human Organization Research* is a rather good "casebook" review of the ethical problems of the social science researcher: relations with colleagues, with informants, with the employing entity, with the subject organization or culture, etc.

The five edited books are more or less interdisciplinary in intent and to a considerable degree in fact. It is usually assumed, and sometimes explicitly stated that organizations are complex interactions of phenomena of interest to all the social (or behavioral) sciences; and that therefore all disciplines are or should be concerned, so that the contribution of each may supplement and enrich that of the others. Sometimes it is thought that research should be undertaken by interdisciplinary teams, so that personal and disciplinary interaction will have an immediate "multiplier" effect; and there are some reports on interdisciplinary projects. Sometimes it is thought that, while organizational phenomena cross

all the conventional disciplinary boundaries, the researcher to be effective must have mastered several disciplines, transforming himself into a general-purpose social scientist. At the extreme it may be held that organizational research is a multidisciplinary (or somehow unique) field in itself, to be differentiated from other social or behavioral sciences.

While multidisciplinary, the material presented is far from representing all disciplines equally. Sociology, business administration (and industrial management), social psychology, and anthropology are all well represented. Economics is less prominent. About a fourth of the contributions are by writers whose disciplinary background or professional-scientific interest is not to be classified by common academic field; they are multidisciplinary, perhaps, or identified with a research focus that has no clear disciplinary status. A few have clear labels, but outside social science: a mathematical biologist, for example.

Conspicuously absent are writers identified (at least presently and prominently) with public administration, political science, or history. This surely is no accident, but a judgment on the part of the editors that whatever the usefulness of these disciplines they have nothing at present to contribute to sophisticated organization theory or research. Nor for that matter is there any attention given to governmental organizations, excepting a few studies of the military, two slices from Selznick's study of the T.V.A., a piece on the problems of conducting social science research under contract with a Federal agency,<sup>2</sup> a report on patterns of communication in a government agency, and two pieces by one author discussing the problems of doing research in the Japanese Relocation Centers. Since it is generally assumed or asserted that organization has universals regardless of purpose or structure of particular organizations, this neglect of government may not be significant. But, it is at least a bit ironical that an enterprise that aspires for universality in its fruits should be so parochial in its roots.<sup>3</sup> In fact,

<sup>1</sup> Altogether there is a considerable amount of mathematical and quasi-mathematical formulation in the six books, and in some selections diagrams and equations bulk larger than prose. I confess that much of this was beyond my competence, and that I was limited to following the trail up to its disappearance into the clouds and picking it up again where it came down, always at about the same place. I accept it on authority that the view is much better at the higher altitudes, and draw what comfort I can from the fact that there is no significant change in latitude.

<sup>2</sup> Having had an experience similar to that related, I advise anyone contemplating such a research contract to read this piece: "Client Structure and the Research Process," by Smith, Sim, and Bealer, in *Human Organization Research*.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Rubenstein and Haberstroh state in their Preface that, "Although the dominant emphasis

excepting the anthropologists, the "organization theorists" smell strongly of the American factory. And students of public administration, after two decades of dispersal around the world, are (despite all their anguished cries about how "culture bound" their discipline is) comparatively cosmopolitan.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the points made in this attempt to characterize the six books will be illustrated or emphasized by indicating the names that occur frequently. The name Chris Argyris is prominent, as there are three of his essays in addition to his *Understanding Organization Behavior*. Without meaning to belittle Argyris, who is certainly one of the more rewarding to read,<sup>5</sup> his prominence is in part due to the "accidental" inclusion of his book. Not accidental, certainly, is the pre-eminence of the name of the unique and all but ubiquitous Herbert Simon, and on the manifest evidence a Simon Admiration Society of respectable size could be formed among the editors and contributors. The names of (at least) Anatol Rapoport, E. Wight Bakke, Jacob Marschak, Rensis Likert, and Richard Cyert appear on essays in more than one book. The names Peter Blau, William Foote Whyte, James Thompson, Kurt Lewin, and Harold Guetzkow will help further to suggest scope and orientation. There are no selections from Mary Parker Follett or Ordway Tead.

is on commercial and industrial organizations, the reader will appreciate that the principles discussed apply to any type of organization, including governmental, philanthropic, military, educational, voluntary, or political." The most restrained response I can make to such a statement is that it is presumptuous. There may be universal "principles," but we are a long way from knowing *whether* this is true, and *what* they may be.

<sup>4</sup>On the other hand, Edward H. Litchfield says in his Foreword to the Pittsburgh volume: "More sophisticated public administrators are now giving attention to the developments in business administration, but it has not been my observation that a great deal of interest in or knowledge of such developments has yet permeated to the working levels of public administration throughout the country." (p. viii) The editors of this volume, in their Preface, also feel that they must explain the "omission" of public administration by lamenting that despite their overseas involvement the public administrationists are not interested in "the administrative process involved." I have a suggestion for Fred Riggs' mailing list.

<sup>5</sup>Certainly I find him interesting and rewarding. But I cannot forbear observing that I read him with an adventitious interest—in some unusual spelling and syntax.

It may be noted further that nearly all of the pieces printed or reprinted are the product of the past ten years; and that a high proportion of the authors are in their early professional years. In short, while there may be a fortuitous factor in the review of these six books at one time, there is no doubt that organization theory and research are in a boom period, and many signs, including the youth of the participants in the boom, suggest more rather than less of what these books represent.

So much for an attempt to describe and characterize the books as a group. We now look briefly at each. For the most part, we must be content to indicate "what the book is like." Even to indicate the main theme of a hundred selections is impossible. Only a few essays that struck the reviewer as significant or interesting will receive comment. As there is no "natural" order apparent to the reviewer, the order selected is alphabetical, following the listing above.

#### *Human Organization Research*

The book edited by Adams and Preiss was published for the Society for Applied Anthropology, and seventeen of the thirty-two articles therein are reprinted from the Society's journal, now titled *Human Organization*. While the anthropological outlook is very strong, two-thirds of the contributors (say the editors) designate themselves sociologists. As the subtitle indicates, the book is focused upon "Field Relations and Techniques," and of the six books we deal with, this is the least concerned with general theory, the most closely concerned with research processes. Having decided upon a book on field research, say the editors, the material they found fell into "two fairly clear-cut areas: human relations, and instruments or techniques" (p. ix), and half the book is given to each.

This is also the book identified above as having the "softest" view of organization. Organization is not defined—certainly not by the editors—and from all that the book contains, "organization" is what exists when any two or more people are gathered together in any name whatsoever; though we are given an orienting observation in a Foreword by the President of the Society for Applied Anthropology, to the effect that the hallmark of the applied anthropologist is that he "tries to



see the particular problem with which he is concerned as part of a larger functioning configuration of organizational and behavioral patterns, rather than in isolation." (p. vi)

Since few of the readers of *Public Administration Review* will be faced with the problem of installing a research team in an Indian village, or of translating interviews in Thai into English, this book may seem far afield indeed. The reviewer, however, found it one of the more interesting books that he set himself to read during the past year. It does not irritate with pretentiousness, and the pieces have the concreteness of case materials; indeed, the settings are so varied and exotic that there is some of the appeal of the travelogue. Probably any researcher (academic or "practicing") in public administration who has not finished learning would find something of value in it.

#### *Understanding Organizational Behavior*

This work by Argyris ranges widely between very general—but easily read—theoretical formulations to extensive quotations from interviews with factory workers, complete with Plain Talk. One has the impression that Argyris is writing too much, repeating himself—*Understanding Organizational Behavior* repeats the theoretical presentation of his *Personality and Organization* (1957), and there is further repetition in the three essays by his pen in the other books here represented. One also has the impression, however, of an unusual and desirable balance between the theoretical and the concrete, and between the scientific and the normative; of great energy, inquisitiveness, and a capacity for experimentation and growth.

In briefest compass, the theory developed at some length in *Personality and Organization* and repeated briefly in Chapter I of this work is that there is a conflict between the needs of the personality and the needs of the organization, and much of what takes place in organizations is to be understood in terms (a) of the resulting dissatisfactions and frustrations of the employees who react and adapt in various ways, (b) the resulting reactions by management to employee resistances and adaptations, which may actually accentuate the "undesirable" resistances and adaptations, and (c) the continual and intricate feedback and interac-

tion of the system of dynamic tension thus established. Informal organization and activities are the chief manifestations of employees' attempts to satisfy personality needs left unsatisfied or even actively frustrated by formal organization; but precisely these phenomena are the chief aberrations and ills of organization as seen by management.

Much more would have to be said to present the theory properly; and the criticisms that could then be made and the responses to the criticism would only open up the door to ethical and scientific questions that will perplex us as far into the future as we can imagine. If the employee has a thrust toward "self-actualization" that is thwarted by "a pyramid-shaped structure usually called the 'formal organization'," (p. 1) to what extent is his thwarted nature innate, to what extent culturally determined? Assuming that the frustration exists and self-actualization (whatever that is) is desirable, to what extent do alternative and better organizational strategies exist? If they do not exist, can they be created?

We should not leave the impression that this is a book concerned with exploring such questions in general and at length. Chapter II goes on to "Diagnostic Procedures," and the bulk of the book is concerned with the use of the semi-structured interview in organizational diagnosis and prognosis. Nor is it a discussion in abstract; the extensive empirical material, always related to the theoretical framework, concerns research made by Argyris in an unnamed but obviously very real industrial plant.

#### *Modern Organization Theory*

The papers that compose this book are the product of a symposium held at the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior at Ann Arbor in February 1959. In addition to the "academic participants" who read the papers, there was present an impressive roster of business executives. Since the papers are hardly light reading and active executives probably are not often operating at this level of abstraction, one wonders what these worthy gentlemen got out of it, apart from the agreeable feeling of contributing to a good cause in elevated surroundings.

The book consists of eleven papers or essays, counting the introductory chapter "Recurrent Themes and General Issues in Organ-

ization Theory" by the editor. Chapter Two consists of an essay by E. Wight Bakke, "Concept of Social Organization," which is both a highly general and abstract formulation of theory and a summary statement of presentations he has previously made in *The Bonds of Organization* and *The Fusion Process*. While this is the essay of broadest scope, two or three of the other essays (including one by Argyris) develop a theory of organization in very general terms, and all of the essays proceed at a high level of abstraction, even though their focus may be one particular part or aspect of organizational theory. Perhaps the point is made by noting that the other contributors are Cyert and March, Rapoport, Whyte, Likert, Dubin, Cartwright, and Marschak.

Excepting the *General Systems* volume, this book was the most difficult reading for the reviewer, but also the most rewarding. The feeling of reward for hard work was related, no doubt, to a long-standing if little-cultivated interest in general socio-political theory, and whether or not the book is "worthwhile" for any particular individual is probably to be gauged by his taste for theory.

Of the various essays, the editor found particularly intriguing and suggestive Haire's "Biological Models and Empirical Histories of the Growth of Organizations." This is a report on a study of the patterns of growth of various organizations, using a "biological model" for purposes of reference and comparison. The essay intrigues in part, perhaps, because of its unabashed use of biological analogies in a period in which this is regarded (in the company the editor-author keeps) with disdain and suspicion. Anyhow, the essay centers on the square-cube law "which points out that in normal spacial geometry, as volume increases by a cubic function, the surface inclosing it increases by a square," and dictates that fleas and elephants will be very dissimilar in structure and in actions. And anyone who has ever wondered about organizational efficiency in relation to size, or worried about the excessive growth of staff and auxiliary services in his organization, will find the analogies and hypotheses—whether significant or specious—fascinating.

### *General Systems: Contributions to Organization Theory*

Approximately half of the 1959 *Yearbook* of the Society for General Systems Research consists of Part II, "Contributions to Organization Theory." The first of the eight essays, "Thoughts on Organization Theory and A Review of Two Conferences," by Rapoport and W. J. Horvath, is an interesting essay to which we shall return below. Suffice it here to note that one of the two conferences referred to is the Ann Arbor Conference; and that the three following essays by Bakke, Argyris, and Marschak are the same essays, identically or substantially, as those appearing in the Haire volume. Two of the remaining four, "Artificial Organisms" and "Digital Simulation of an Evolutionary Process," are, in terms of a distinction drawn below, "organization theory" rather than "theory of organization." Indeed, they are Far Out, and a bit frightening to one introduced to the study of administration through White's Second Edition.

"Games, Decisions, and Organizations" by Russell L. Ackoff is a counter-argument, in English prose, against the enthusiasm of the past decade for Game Theory. There has been, he argues, a misconception derived from a failure to distinguish an "exercise" from a "problem," a failure that "has led many scientists to play games while suffering under the illusion that they are conducting theoretical or experimental inquiries." (p. 145) "In a real problem-solving situation the decision maker is not given a game to play, he must extract it out of the situation itself." (p. 146) However: The believer in Experience and Common Sense cannot draw too much solace from this, for some of the most ardent believers in the efficacy of mathematics have long been of opinion that Game Theory, though certainly useful, has been oversold by its devotees.

The final essay, "Explorations in the Realm of Organization Theory," by Richard L. Meier, is a curious, rambling, but interesting and rewarding piece, essentially a series of reflections and observations induced by a review of the works of Herbert Simon, "certainly the most fertile mind intensively investigating the properties of organization at the present time." (p. 185) We note only that, apropos the rise of new management technologies, espe-

cially the burgeoning information technology, Meier foresees the rise of a new elite: "A technical elite is already appearing on the scene to handle this apparatus, and it is important to observe that it reports directly to the executive or his immediate staff. We may anticipate that this elite will become isolated from the middle management of the firm so that top men do not work up from the lowest professional ranks, as at present, but enter as organization 'specialists' of one kind or another." (p. 197) This is followed by broader speculation on the social implications of the "Rise of the Meritocracy": "A 'meritocracy' is a Platonic republic embedded in modern Western culture employing late twentieth century technology and behavioral science." (p. 198) There is irony here, for it is the jibe of the behaviorists that their tradition-bound colleagues ought to leave off counting the bones of "those dead men," whose concerns were metaphysics and morality, not social science.

#### *Comparative Studies in Administration*

This volume consists of twelve pieces, each a chapter, in addition to a Foreword by Edward H. Litchfield. Part I is an essay by the editors, "On the Study of Administration." To quote from the summary of the essay is an economical way both to indicate its nature, and to suggest the floor of the book: "The objective has been set as a valid theory which will encompass all types of administration and be adaptive to all cultural or historical contexts. A strategy for moving toward that objective has been outlined. The strategy involves focusing on complex organization as the unit of analysis, but to see the organization both in a larger context, in interaction with its environment, and in terms of its parts." (p. 14)

Part II deals with "Organizational Comparisons," Part III with "Environmental Comparisons," Part IV with "Variations in Process," and Part V with "Research Frontiers." Those interested in comparative administration will find this a rewarding volume. There is a conceptual framework—agree with it or not—that gives unity; there is a quality of integrity (given probably by the hand of Thompson, whose name as author or co-author appears on four essays); several of the essays are very stimulating.

In fact, the reviewer found one of the selections the most interesting of the total lot of one hundred. This is a piece reprinted from *The American Anthropologist*, "Two Concepts of Authority," by Walter B. Miller. The essay treats the concept of authority of the Central Algonkian Indians, the Fox, in comparison with the European concept—in both cases in relation to history, language, religion, geography, etc. The Fox, he argues, have not and do not conceive of authority in the way that seems part of the order of nature to a European. The European conception is vertical: power flows downward, from God, Pope, King, owners, and managers. "The vertical authority relationship is a fundamental building block of European society. Without it the phenomenon of 'ranked' authority—where given individuals are permanently empowered to direct others—would be impossible. . . ." (p. 101) In contrast, the Fox conception is horizontal: his gods are earthbound and "manitu power" situational and fluid. "In brief, Fox society lacks 'vertical' authority, and the co-ordination of collective action utilizing the device of role-relationship combining the right to direct, permanent incumbency, differential prestige, differential functions, and differential access to procedural rules." (p. 113) Which is not to say that some kind of Science of Administration or Theory of Organization is impossible; but to speak relevantly, importantly, to ways of approaching them and what their nature might be.

#### *Some Theories of Organization*

This book edited by Rubenstein and Haberstroh is the only one of the works under consideration with an avowed pedagogical purpose. It is described in the Preface as a "textbook . . . intended to integrate scientific studies of organization from many of the traditional scholarly disciplines," with "the principal purpose envisioned" as use in senior or graduate courses in curricula in business administration, industrial management, or industrial engineering. Thirty-eight selections (some only two or three pages) are presented, organized under the following headings: "The Nature of Organization Theory," "Organizational Structure and Process," "Leadership and Morale," "Communication," "Control and Evaluation," and "Decision Making." A

brief essay by the editors introduces each of six divisions. The selections range widely, from Max Weber and Chester Barnard, the oldest and most "traditional" selections in all of the six books, to, say, a piece "Evaluation of Decisions Written by *Ad Hoc* Groups and Simulated Commanders." Though the selections from Weber and Barnard represent a concession to the past, "inspirational" and "intuitive" pieces are omitted—at least in the editors' intention.

There is much good material in this book, including the introductory essays written by the editors, and it would be pleasant to report it an unqualified success. Unfortunately, however, it must be reported that it is a rather diffuse and confusing book. It is not clear what the editors wished to accomplish, other than represent as many points of view and please as many users as possible. (Of course, they wanted to Be Scientific, but this hardly will do as an answer—nobody in this day sets off to be un-scientific.) The pieces often seem to relate to each other only by editorial fiat and physical proximity, and their usual brevity heightens the reader's sense of discontinuity.

The reviewer hastens to add that while he cannot report that the editors won the game, perhaps they were playing a game impossible to win. As it happens, the reviewer has tried his hand at putting together a book of readings with a pedagogical end in view, and can certainly sympathize with the discomforts entailed. It is rather like trying to do a jig-saw puzzle when some of "your" pieces are missing, and you also have intermixed pieces from other puzzles.

## II

Referring to the diversity of approach among his authors, Haire recalls the fable of the blind men describing an elephant: "There is little doubt here that it is a single elephant being discussed, but, by and large, each of the observers begins his description from a different point, and often with a special end in view." (p. 2)

In point of fact it is not clear that all of the contributors to this volume, much less all the contributors to the several volumes, are talking about the same elephant, or even members of the same species. How do we know

that they are not really describing ropes, fans, walls, snakes, trees, and spears—as they often appear to be? In view of the inclusiveness, the diversity, the amorphousness of the materials put under Organization Theory heading nowadays, one must conclude that, if they all concern the same elephant, it is a *very* large elephant with a generalized elephantiasis.

It may be worthwhile, therefore, to try to get some perspective on the currently popular preoccupation with organization theory. How did it arise? What's old and what's new in the movement? What are the ways in which organization is defined, what is a "theory of organization" in the view of the various writers, what are the conceptual schemes that may help to enlighten and clarify? No doubt the "theory of the theories" deserves a book, but a few pages may be better than nothing.

## A Look Backward

Writers on theory of organization make much of recent and rapid development—"even ten years ago, it would not have been possible to bring together such a group of papers." Indeed, this sense of recent origins and rapid development tends to be shared widely among the behaviorally oriented who are concerned with the development of "administrative science," whether or not they are identified with organization theory by name or intent. No doubt the self-conscious pioneer always is inclined to deprecate his forerunners so that his own exploits may appear the greater,<sup>6</sup> but there is a sense in which the current writers are quite correct. Volume XI of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1933) contains the entry "Organization, Administrative," by Herman Finer, and the entry "Organization, Economic," by Walton Hamilton (in addition to the piece by L. D. White, "Administration, Public," in Volume I), but there is no entry for Theory of Organization or Organization Theory. It is wholly predictable that the new

<sup>6</sup> A study of stock phrases and postures in the opening and concluding portions of social science writings is interesting and, if one is so inclined, amusing: predecessors generally have been stupid, confused, bemused. Now, however, there are Momentous New Developments, we are beginning to Get the Subject Organized, and the present essay hopefully is a Modest Contribution to that end. Hopefully, also, it will soon be superseded by Better Formulations, for All Signs Now Point to Rapid Progress. In any event, Further Research is Necessary.



edition of this work, now in the planning, will have a lengthy essay under one of these headings. There *are* new data, new ideas, new interminglings of disciplines, and fresh strong impulses, all in addition to the idea that it is useful to try to theorize about organization "as such."

Nevertheless, there are many themes in the contemporary writings with roots and analogues in the past, more than the contemporary writers would appear to believe; as anyone can verify who will, for example, leaf through the pages of the *Papers on the Science of Administration* (1937). In the study of administration one can find for at least two generations back, firm declarations that what up to this point has been art, experience, guess, and intuition is now about to become Science, that momentous and converging developments now make this possible for the first time, that what has seemed diverse is about to be unified by general, abstract principles or theories, etc. As to theory of organization, specifically, the *Papers* are introduced by Luther Gulick's famous "Notes on the Theory of Organization." In a more general sense much of social science (if I may use the term) through the centuries has dealt with theory of organization. John Gaus once suggested that Plato's *Republic* be viewed as a treatise on personnel administration; alternatively, it might be viewed as a treatise on organizing a government. In short, when one of our writers states that some years ago a discussion of organization theory would have dealt with such things as line and staff and span of control, whereas present writers deal with all manner of different things, he is correct; but it is not yet clear what the new theory *is*, nor how great is the net gain.

### From Administrative Theory to Organization Theory

The rise to popularity of organization theory probably can be attributed to various sources, among them the oft-cited fact that ours is an Age of Organization and that this pervasive phenomenon is a natural subject for attention. It is plausible, however, that fashions in social science methodology and philosophy have played a part. In general, among those concerned with the Scientific approach to the study of "cooperative action,"

there has been something of a movement away from the terms "administration," "administrative," and "administrative theory" to the terms "organization," "organizational," and "organization theory." It is hypothesized (to use a favorite expression of our authors) that the mood and methods of behavioralism are responsible for this movement, and my speculation runs as follows.

The behavioralists want above all else, of course, to be Scientific in the study of social phenomena, taking as their model what they conceive to be the outlook and methods of physical science. The general goal is a value-free generalization about how the subject phenomena behave, given specified conditions. "Values" are proper data for scientific generalizations, but the social scientist, as scientist, has no concern for their "intrinsic validity" (if I may be forgiven the term). Technologies and applied sciences take the theories achieved by pure science and use them in the realization of human values. To be sure, this is desirable and gives further importance to the enterprise of pure science; but pure science is higher on the Scientist's value-scale than applied science. Pure science is *purser*, untainted by the humanness of values.

Now, administration, private or public, is an applied science—if it is not indeed a profession, an art, or something less. "Administrative theory" suggests an engagement with the world, a striving after values. One can, to be sure, make a respectable compromise, and seek a "normative science," one in which values are posited but not justified, striven for but not examined; and some would argue that for administrative (or organizational) science this not only is the best approach, but the only feasible one. But even in this case particular organizational values must be dealt with aseptically.

"Organization," on the other hand, suggests something "out there." Organizations are value-saturated, of course, but the researcher can be free not only from the values of particular organizations, but from the administrator's natural involvement with the organization's values. He can become an anthropologist, so to speak, completely detached from the society he observes.<sup>7</sup> Organization theory—

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that many anthropologists argue that they must become a part of the society they observe,

"how things are"—suggests, in short, less value-involvement than administrative theory—"how things should be done (at least if you want to achieve such-and-such)."

### The Meaning of Theory

Since our undertaking is an examination of theory of organization, with a view to assessing the present status of this theory, a proper next step is to ask: What is theory? *This* is a tangled skein, for certain; but fortunately our involvement can be brief. One or two distinctions will serve our purposes.

As used in this discussion, an organizational theory means simply a conceptual scheme, the aim (but not necessarily the achievement) of which is to enable us to understand, to predict, and to control (if we wish) organizational phenomena. We regard it as quite legitimate to use the term theory in treating of the ethical, the valuational; but we shall not use it here in that connection, except as such considerations are involved in descriptive or causal theories of an "if-then" variety.

On the other hand, we avoid the strict meaning of the term given in the physical sciences (or at least by their interpreters), according to which a theory not only is a tight logical structure with empirical referents, but can be refuted by a single contrary empirical finding. (Presumably, nobody would argue that we have yet achieved much if any organizational theory by *these* criteria.) Most importantly, we shall not distinguish between *theories* and *models*,<sup>8</sup> meaning by the latter conceptual representations of organizational phenomena, the first aim of which is *understanding* as a step toward prediction and control, but which, compared to theories, are generally looser in logical structure and less precisely, and differently, related to their empirical referents. Some would prefer to call "models" many or all of the conceptualizations reviewed below. They may, if they wish!

### "About It, and About"

Those who not only do much of their living in organizations but deal with them profes-

in order to understand it. But some of the students of organization are more anthropological than the anthropologists!

<sup>8</sup>Rubenstein and Haberstroh's introductory essay, "The Nature of Organization Theory," is recommended

sionally, so to speak, may feel that it is very obvious what organization "is," and that attempts to construct theories of organization are at best an unnecessary elaboration, at worst a positive obfuscation. There is, to be sure, a case for knowledge gained from personal experience, for the intuitive, for direct sensual perception; for some purposes such knowledge, not theoretical constructs, is of the essence. However, only the mildest sort of commitment to the position that through study administration can become more scientific (not necessarily A Science) suffices to arouse a concern for organizational theory. What is the "stuff" of organization? How does it move? To have any answer that can be stated in general terms, even if the level of abstraction is not high, is to have a theory of organization.

A definition of organization is a theory of organization—at least a crude sketch of a theory—for it must necessarily try to state in general, more or less abstract, terms what the essentials are and how they relate. Who has not tried his hand at framing a one-sentence (or even one-paragraph) definition of organization has denied himself an educational experience of high value. The abstract nouns and adjectives that are the conventional building blocks will be found to be unbelievably complex, awkward, misshapen.<sup>9</sup> At the end, one may believe he knows less rather than more about organization, but he is likely to have a new respect for semantics and more understanding of the problems of the scientific enterprise in its application to human affairs.

Personally, I am of two minds about the value of taking the problem of definition seriously, head-on, as a part of the scientific enterprise or (and) constructing useful theory. On the one hand it seems cavalier, even outrageously slipshod, to try to proceed to a careful examination of any phenomena without an attempt to define, that is, to understand and agree upon, what the object of examina-

reading for those wishing to sharpen their thinking with reference to these distinctions.

<sup>9</sup>To escape the frustrations and to solve the problems of precise statement some social scientists turn from words to a quasi-mathematical notational system. There is undoubtedly significant gain in some areas, but there is inescapably some loss, if only in general understanding; and at worst the result may be only a private language with neither significant empirical referents nor heuristic value.

tion is, at least in general terms and as now understood. On the other hand, one can argue persuasively that the scientific enterprise has no close and necessary relationship to conventional definitions, that the verbal difficulties outweigh the scientific gain, that the problem of definition can really only be solved by by-passing it and proceeding to activities that eventually will "define" in meaningful, operational terms.

The first of these positions is best represented among the writers in our six volumes by E. Wight Bakke, whose "Concept of the Social Organization" is an essay in definition. It worries him that, though there is a large and growing literature dealing with organizations and organizational behavior, "seldom does one find a careful and systematic description of the nature of the 'thing' with whose internally and externally directed activity the hypotheses are concerned." (p. 16) After twenty pages of wind-up, Bakke delivers the following one-sentence definition:

A social organization is a continuing system of differentiated and coordinated human activities utilizing, transforming, and welding together a specific set of human, material, capital, ideational, and natural resources into a unique problem-solving whole engaged in satisfying particular human needs in interaction with other systems of human activities and resources in its environment. (p. 37)

This is followed by thirty-five pages in which the meaning of the definition is explained, its implications explored.<sup>10</sup> To me, the essay is rewarding, but also, eventually, confusing and mystifying. Frankly, I don't understand what The Fusion Process is, unless it consists of phenomena with which, under different names, I have long been familiar.

Various of the other writers in our six volumes attempt definitions,<sup>11</sup> but most of them

<sup>10</sup> The "major features essential to a more specific definition of a particular organization," to which the discussion is devoted, are (1) The Organizational Charter (the image of the organization's unique wholeness), (2) The Basic Resources (as listed in the definition), (3) The Activity Processes (by which the resources are acquired and manipulated) and (4) The Bonds of Organization (which integrate into operating systems (1), (2), and (3)).

<sup>11</sup> Most notably, Argyris: "Organizations are grand strategies individuals create to achieve objectives that require the effort of many." (p. 24) Much of Chapter I of *Understanding Organizational Behavior* is an essay in definition.

are content simply to ignore the problem—indeed, given their limited concerns, they are justified in ignoring it. We turn to the recent *Organization* (1958), by James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, to illustrate the other extreme. This work is a presentation of all organization theory, as the authors conceive the subject, in summary, schematic form; and it might be presumed, therefore, to begin with a careful definition of a title stated in one word, no qualifiers, no subtitle. Instead, the book begins simply:

This book is about the theory of formal organizations. It is easier, and probably more useful, to give examples of formal organizations than to define the term. The United States Steel Corporation is a formal organization; so is the Red Cross, the corner grocery store, the New York Highway Department. . . . But for present purposes we need not trouble ourselves about the precise boundaries to be drawn around an organization. . . . We are dealing with empirical phenomena, and the world has an uncomfortable way of not permitting itself to be fitted into neat classifications.

This reasoning is very appealing to me. But I still find myself wondering about the significance of "formal" in the first sentence, about the criteria by which a formal organization is differentiated from a non-formal or un-formal organization, and whether the authors really mean to assert that a corner grocery store is a formal organization (and if so, what would an informal organization look like?).

### The Classical Theory

The theory of organization best known to American students of administration, of course, is that developed largely in the Scientific Management movement during the early decades of this century. This theory, designated "classical" by March and Simon, is (for students of public administration) closely associated with the noted *Papers on the Science of Administration*, which contains the well-known essays by Gulick, Urwick, Fayol, Mooney, and others. It is the theory that, taking efficiency as the objective, views administration as a technical problem concerned basically with the division of labor and the specialization of function. It is the theory which (in Gulick's famous essay) distinguishes four organizational bases: purpose, process, clientele or materiel, and place; and designates the work of the executive as concerned

with POSDCORB—Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting. Its symbol is the organization chart.

For the readers of this *Review* no more need be said in explanation or elaboration. But what should be said in trying to see such theory in perspective?

Since publication of the *Papers* in 1937, a generation of younger students have demolished the classical theory, again and again; they have uprooted it, threshed it, thrown most of it away. By and large, the criticisms of the new generation have been well-founded. In many ways the classical theory was crude, presumptuous, incomplete—wrong in some of its conclusions, naive in its scientific methodology, parochial in its outlook. In many ways it was the End of a Movement, not the foundation for a science.

Nevertheless, not only is the classical theory still today the formal working theory of large numbers of persons technically concerned with administrative-organizational matters, both in the public and the private spheres, but I expect that it will be around a long, long time. This not necessarily because it is “true,” though I should say that it has much truth in it, both descriptively and prescriptively; that is to say, both as a description of organizations as we find them in our society and as a prescription for achieving the goals of these organizations “efficiently.” But in any event a social theory widely held by the actors has a self-confirming tendency and the classical theory now is deeply ingrained in our culture. Granted, the new girl in the typing pool may know little of it but, on the other hand, she very certainly would not even have heard of a Feedback Loop or a Bavelas Communication Net. Not only is the simplicity and wide diffusion of the classical theory in its favor, we have made cultural adjustments to it: at every level from the heights of Pittsburgh to the new girl in the typing pool, we know when to take it seriously, when to charge it with error or injustice, when to acknowledge it formally while we ignore it informally.

### **Bureaucracy**

The map of the organizational world associated with the term bureaucracy and the name Max Weber is also “classical,” in the

sense that it has been with us for some time and has had many “believers,” much attention. It, too, has been much subject to criticism during the past decade, both on scientific and moralistic grounds. As to the former, March and Simon treat such theory rather peremptorily, placing it in effect in their “paleolithic” period.<sup>12</sup>

Bureaucratic theory enjoyed a vogue in this country following the publication of two translations of Weber’s relevant writings immediately after World War II. In general, Weber’s description of bureaucracy as one type of organization merely puts in formal terms what most of us are familiar with in working for or dealing with government bureaus or business corporations: it is the familiar picture of a hierarchy of authority organizing and in turn shaped by the division of labor and the specialization of function, with full-time positions filled in principle on merit, regular career ladders, etc. But it was the frame in which this familiar picture was placed that made it exciting to some. Speaking for myself, not only was I greatly stimulated on first reading, I am sure I could now read Weber on bureaucracy for the tenth time with fresh insights.

The point is that Weber related what is “natural” for us by deep inculturation, to history, to economic life, to technological development, to political philosophy, to social structure and processes. Bureaucratic-type organization as *the* most efficient way of doing things develops, he argued, in conjunction with certain other developments in a society, and it acts upon and in turn is shaped by these environing factors.

Though the Weber vogue has subsided, he inspired and continues, even if indirectly, to inspire considerable scholarship—I venture to call it scientific inquiry—from various students, particularly and naturally from the sociologists. Much of what is written “refutes” some aspect of Weber; much more “qualifies” some aspect of Weber. But this is the natural pattern of the scientific enterprise, and that there continues to be need to refute or qualify this or that bureaucratic hypothesis is a tribute to

<sup>12</sup> Just above Frederick Taylor. In point of fact, it would be arbitrary to place Weber any place in the schema of the book; but in view of the fact that his central concern was rationality, he might with more aptness have been treated in that connection.



the strength and vitality of the theory. Certainly any striving toward a general organizational theory through the comparative route cannot ignore bureaucratic theory; nor until a more accurate and revealing picture of the total organizational world is created, can anyone ignore bureaucratic theory if the objective is the central one of a liberal education: to understand one's world in relation to oneself.

### Simon's Three-Fold Schemata

Simon, and March and Simon, have set forth two more or less complementary conceptualizations—theories, schemata, maps, or models, I am not sure what is the proper term—for viewing, classifying, and understanding organizations and organization theory.

The first of these, chronologically, is set forth in Simon's essay "Comments on the Theory of Organizations," published in 1954 in the *American Political Science Review* and reprinted in the volume by Rubenstein and Haberstroh. Here we begin with a definition:

Human organizations are systems of interdependent activity, encompassing at least several primary groups and usually characterized, at the level of consciousness of participants, by a high degree of rational direction of behavior toward ends that are objects of common acknowledgement and expectation. (p. 157)

As an empirical matter, Simon feels that organizational phenomena are different from those of institutions on the one hand, and primary groups on the other;<sup>13</sup> and while the differentiation on either side is far from sharp, he feels that the organizational "level" meets appropriate tests for scientific study and theory construction—tests of internal cohesion and differentiation from the next level.

Addressing himself to the organizational level, so to speak, he then discusses "Major Problem Areas." He makes clear that he does not purport to be presenting finished theory: "Until we know what frames of reference are going to be the most useful for organization theory, it will surely be desirable to retain alternative frameworks, and to take considerable pains to develop means for translating

from one framework to another." (p. 159) The major problem areas he conceives as: (1) the process of decision making in an organization, (2) the phenomena of power in organizations, (3) rational and non-rational aspects of behavior in organization, (4) the organizational environment and the social environment, (5) stability and change in organizations, and (6) specialization and the division of work.

Returning in conclusion to a justification of his focus, Simon states:

The characteristics of this level that give it its particular flavor are the following: (a) its focus on relations among interlocking or non-interlocking primary groups rather than on relations within primary groups; (b) it is largely concerned with situations where *zweckrationalität* plays a large role relative to *wertrationalität* (as compared with the study either of small groups or of cultures); (c) in these situations the scheme of social interaction becomes itself partly a resultant of the rational contriving of means and the conscious construction and acting out of "artificial" roles; and (d) explanation of phenomena at this level requires the closest attention to the fluid boundaries of rational adaptation, including the important boundaries imposed by group frames of reference, perceptual frameworks, and symbolic techniques.

There is no ostensible attempt to relate *Organizations* to this earlier "Comments on the Theories of Organizations," but the two fit together, after a fashion, to form a larger schema. That is, we can assume that the three-fold distinction between institutions, organizations, and primary groups remains; and that a new three-fold distinction introduced in *Organizations* is theory of organization, i.e., theory about the organization "layer." This does not seem too arbitrary, despite the fact that organizations are now designated "social institutions" (p. 2) and that the book contains considerable summary of the theory of primary groups.

Be that as it may, there is a new three-fold schema introduced. Three "models" are discerned, each concentrating on a partial aspect of the human organism, and, though overlapping, coming in chronological sequence:

Thus, the model of the employee as instrument is prominent in the writings of the scientific management movement. In the last several decades the second model, emphasizing attitudes and motivations, has gained the greater prominence in research in bureaucracy, human relations, leadership and supervision, and power phenomena. The third model, emphasizing the rational and intellectual aspects of organizational behavior, has been less extensively used than the other

<sup>13</sup> "We will restrict the term 'organization' to systems that are larger than primary groups, smaller than institutions. Clearly, the lower boundary is sharper than the upper." (p. 158) I thought "institutions" was explained or characterized by "economic institution," but on a hurried re-reading cannot find this phrase.

two, but is represented particularly by the work of the economists and others on the planning process, and by the work of psychologists on organizational communication and problem-solving. (p. 7)

Though *Organizations* is not organized in three distinct "parts," as this language suggests, nevertheless the theory summarized in the book is ranged along a scale, beginning with the "classical" and ending with the planners. The schema is obviously one of large scope, great adaptability, and considerable usefulness.

### Theory of Organization and/or Organization Theory

In their essay in the *General Systems Yearbook*, "Thoughts on Organization Theory and a Review of Two Conferences," Rapoport and Horvath present a sharp distinction between organization theory and theory of organization:

We see organization theory as dealing with general and abstract organizational principles; it applies to any system exhibiting organized complexity. As such, organization theory is seen as an extension of mathematical physics or, even more generally, of mathematics designed to deal with organized systems. The theory of organizations, on the other hand, purports to be a social science. It puts real human organizations at the center of interest. It may study the social structure of organizations and so can be viewed as a branch of sociology; it can study the behavior of individuals or groups as members of organizations and so can be viewed as a part of social psychology; it can study power relations and principles of control in organizations and so fits into political science. (p. 90)

As to organization theory, the authors perceive three important lines of development that had no important part in classical physics but which show promise of providing its theoretical underpinnings, and then of extension, hopefully, to theory of organization, namely, (1) cybernetics, the theory of complex interlocking "chains of causation," from which goal seeking and self-controlling forms of behavior emerge, (2) topology or relational mathematics, and (3) decision theory, including such branches as game theory. However, they warn against "premature application" and observe that "'Scientism' is still a predominant childhood disease of organization theory as it is applied in social science." (p. 91) They foresee, and urge, a diversity of approaches applied under the headings both of organization theory and theory of organiza-

tion, sound a warning on over-optimism and premature cross-applications, but express a hope that eventually "the two streams of ideas will actually merge."

For me, this conceptualization does much to put order into the present blooming, buzzing confusion of "theory concerned with organization(s)." To be sure, it doesn't tuck in all loose ends, doesn't point a solution to all the riddles; but it helps. In terms of the introductory metaphor we know that, for the present at least, there are a minimum of two elephants, not one. It would help if the writers would be very clear as to which one they are addressing themselves, and observe the cautions enjoined by Rapoport and Horvath about relating the one to the other.

### And Back to Administration

To the generalization above that there is a movement from *administration* to *organization* there is a significant exception among the six books for review, namely, the presentation by Thompson and associates, which is in fact titled *Comparative Studies in Administration*—not organization. This is the more significant and interesting because, though the movement from administration to organization is associated with behavioralism, the editors of the Pittsburgh volume are strongly behavioral. They yield to none in their respect and hope for Science, but it is "administrative science" or "science of administration," not organization theory or science, that is the ostensible goal: "We firmly believe that there is in the making a rigorous science of administration, which can account for events in particular times and places and for the ethical or normative content of those events without itself incorporating the particular conditions and values of those events." (p. 4) Their introductory essay, "On the Study of Administration," deserves a look, both because it is a distinctly different and perhaps significant conceptualization of the world on which we seek perspectives, and for its interesting combination of the old dream and even the old term with the latest behavioral thought.

The focus, say the authors, should be on what administration *does* rather than what it *is*. This avoids semantic traps and methodological dead ends. They note that there is "reasonable consensus" that administration is

found in such entities as corporations, trade unions, and philanthropic foundations, but not importantly in "mobs, crowds, or publics." What differentiates the one from the other? "In seeking to answer these questions, we have identified four characteristics among those collectivities which clearly have administration." (p. 5) These four are: (1) Administered organizations exhibit sustained collective action. (2) Administered organizations are integral parts of a larger system. (3) Administered organizations have specialized, delimited goals. (4) Administered organizations are dependent upon interchange with the larger system.

There is some sleight of hand here, as "collectivities," "organizations," "societies," and "systems" are all referred to but not defined or explained. But the end product, "administered organizations" is perhaps clear enough. In any event it is *administered* organizations that are the subject of their study, they are interested in administration as a *process*, and they wish to distinguish between "administrative action" and a broader "organizational action."

However, they recognize that "without an organization to be administered, administrative activity has no meaning or significance," and state that "administrative activity may be defined as activity related to the creation, maintenance, or operation of an organization as an organization." (p. 7) From the four characteristics "posited" as distinguishing administered organizations, they derive three "organizational requirements and administrative functions," namely: (1) structuring of the organization as an administrative function, (2) definition of purpose as an administrative function, and (3) management of the organization-environment exchange system as a function of administration.

These are, hopefully, the essentials. The essay as a whole deserves reading, however, by anyone seeking ways of structuring the administrative-organizational world with which he deals as practitioner or student. The authors deserve a chance to explain how they propose to relate substantive disciplines and process disciplines (their name for cybernetics, etc.) to their grand scheme. The reader may not be convinced, but at least he will be impressed with the stated goal: "a valid theory which will encompass all types of administration and

be adaptive to all cultural or historical contexts."

Hopefully, I have sketched a fairly large variety and range of the ways in which theory of organization can be conceptualized, though I am painfully aware that the treatment is neither exhaustive nor systematic. What observations can we make? What reasonable conclusions are possible to the question: Where are we now?

That there has been a tremendous increase in the number of theories; of theories about the theories; of the number of interested persons; of interdisciplinary connections and borrowings; of the volume of the literature—this is the first and firmest fact. Probably there has also been "progress," and I am optimistic enough to think that there has been a great deal of it since the *Papers*.

Obviously also, however, we are a long, long way from the goal of a theory of organization, in whatever way or ways one might choose to define the term "theory"; and there is no reason to believe that agreement, unification, simplification, and systematization lie in the immediate future. It is clear that, even if we take any one conceptualization, it is fortunate if we get a reasonably clear idea of what the "thing" is in the writer's opinion; and if we take several writers together the answers to the questions of definition of subject, of the type of inquiry that is proper, and of the conclusions that are warranted, become vague, obscure, confused. Of the various writers dealing with theory of organization, Herbert Simon enjoys the highest reputation, and his "maps" are undoubtedly useful. But others also aspire to be the Newton of this science, and the claims of some warrant examination. And it should be re-stated that Simon's "maps," as I called them, are not theory in any strict scientific sense. In fact, Simon (while always confident of present and, especially, future progress) emphasizes often that so far we have achieved little that meets his own high standards for scientific theory.

Fortunately, there does not have to be a single firm, agreed theory in a field before "progress" is possible and demonstrable. The physical sciences have sometimes thrived when within the same field alternative and seem-

ingly incompatible theories flourished,<sup>14</sup> and even, perhaps, we can designate as stagnant periods in which a single theory was unquestioned. It is at least possible that at this stage of exploration and expansion the heuristic<sup>15</sup> value of a variety of theories or models is desirable.

While I am personally optimistic for progress in many directions (my "scientific" standards are much lower than Simon's), it strikes me that the eventual achievement of any general Theory of Organization is as problematical as the achievement of any kind of Unified Social Science. Indeed, I think the two are related. According to all the definitions and schemes we reviewed (except perhaps the "classical"), organizations exist in a larger social environment and interact with it,<sup>16</sup> and a theory of this interaction when firm and finished should mesh with a theory of the milieu.

### Reductionism Versus Holism

I am far from certain what the central problem or issue is in the further development of theory of organization, and in fact the idea of "a" central problem or issue may be specious. Forced to guess, however, I should state the central problem to be that of reductionism versus holism. This is by implication related to the vexing problem of defining the "thing" we are talking about and differentiating it from and relating it to other phenomena.

By reductionism I mean a disposition to explain phenomena by analyzing them into their constituent parts, and these constituent parts in turn into their constituent parts, and so forth, presuming that understanding of the original phenomena can be arrived at by "adding" the understandings of the parts. This is the classical strategy of physical science, and its success in that area hardly

needs underscoring. The basic metaphor of reductionism is mechanical. Machines are understood through their parts; a machine is a combination of parts with determinate "causal" relations.

By holism is meant the theory that phenomena—certain kinds of phenomena at least—can be understood only in terms of the *whole* phenomenon involved, that in some sense the whole is greater than or different from the sum of its parts. Though expounded by such respectable figures as Alfred North Whitehead, holism tends to be suspect because it suggests an "unscientific" metaphysic. It is much more congenial to biology than to physics, and its basic metaphor is organic: a living (at least *higher*) organism must be understood at the level of the living whole. That is to say, there must be a theory appropriate to this level, or the whole is not understood, accounted for, comprehended.

Now perhaps I have some constitutional disposition toward holistic explanations, but I do not wish to be interpreted as arguing that *The Holistic Way Is The Way Forward*. I do have doubts about the value, the "payoff," of some of the reductionist efforts in the study of organization. But I also have doubts about the scientific (though not pedagogical) value of the holistic "case study," as pursued by the Inter-University Case Program.

My point is rather that the analytic-holistic dichotomy provides an interesting perspective on these works on theory of organization. By and large the reductionist tendency is foremost, indeed decidedly so. But a holistic theory or metaphor occasionally occurs. Some of the writers introduce a decided holistic strain of thought, and there are at least two explicit discussions of some of the issues.

As to metaphor, Haire's biological analogy is the most prominent example, but even Simon, who certainly takes "hard" science as his inspiration and model, occasionally uses a biological analogy after taking care that it has been thoroughly disinfected. As to writers who make some attempt to balance the holistic against the analytic, I cite Argyris as outstanding, as he probes the psyche on the one hand but seeks also on the other hand to understand it in relation to an entire organizational (even cultural) *gestalt*.

<sup>14</sup> It could be argued with some force, to be sure, that at least it was clear that the theories were incompatible; whereas in social science the alternative theories are so diverse and shapeless that often one theory cannot be clearly or meaningfully posed against another.

<sup>15</sup> Very good word in social science writings the past few years. I hope I'm not too late with it.

<sup>16</sup> The Pittsburgh group observe (p. 15) that totalitarian governments may be interpreted as attempts to make government (i.e., organization) and society co-terminous. But this is a footnote to their own theory and in a sense proves my point.



The two explicit discussions to which I refer are both in the *General Systems* volume. Rapoport and Horvath introduce their "Thoughts on Organization Theory" with a discussion of the two viewpoints, and then proceed with a hope—and theory—that the two points of view are becoming synthesized, largely through "naturalizing" teleology (i.e., in cybernetics). Richard L. Meier in his "Explorations in the Realm of Organization Theory" has a section titled "March and Simon on 'Organizations'" (pp. 194-95) which is essentially a statement of the holistic elements missing in that review. (The word holistic is mine, not his, but I do not think I do violence to his meaning.) This is the more interesting because Meier yields to nobody in his admiration of Simon.

The argument deserves brief summary: Meier fully agrees that "any science still in its swaddling clothes must concentrate upon phenomena associated with small deviations from equilibrium conditions, not the catastrophes and revolutions. . . ." Equilibrium analysis "provides by far the best foundation for creating a propositional framework that will predict the consequences of events for the system being studied." Yet the failure to observe and study other important factors worries him: "The dynamics of inception, growth, decline, disintegration, salvage, and amalgamation fall outside the range of equilibrium analysis of organizations. What is left is the endless mottled gray of the bureaucratic steady state." Particularly he is concerned with the "missing ingredients" of history, spatial distribution, and the "design of artifacts."

To repeat, I am not arguing that all research be turned in holistic directions. I am merely observing that the choice of one direction or another is obviously important, and may be the central consideration in answering the question: Where do we go from here? Per-

haps we need to go in both directions, separately or in some deliberately chosen "mix."

### It Didn't Begin Yesterday

I close on an old theme—related to the argument of the preceding paragraph—namely, that those concerned with organization theory are denying themselves a source of insight and even, I venture to think, of scientific conclusions and hypotheses when they scorn the traditional literature of social and political theory. March and Simon remark that their review of the literature on organization conveyed the impression that "not a great deal has been said about organizations, but it has been said over and over in a variety of languages." (p. 5) As to the first, I feel quite differently: a great deal has indeed been said, diverse and important. We "know" more, I submit, about organizations and indeed about societies than about some things that have a firm scientific theory.

But one of my frequent feelings in reading the organizational literature is that indeed I have read it before in another language: the language of political theory. When, for example, Bakke writes of the "Organizational Charter" he is (if I understand him at all) writing about something close to the center of the interests of Plato and Aristotle, namely, a group's conception of self-identity and differentiation. Or when Cyert and March talk about "organization as a coalition," the giving of "side payments," and so forth, I think not only of Robert Dahl and David Truman (who are acknowledged), but of a range of names from Machiavelli to George Washington Plunkitt.

Do not mistake me. I do not argue that everything was known by the ancients. Only that anyone who thinks theory of organization began with Fayol or Taylor owes himself a look at the frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Now *there's* an organization chart!